

To Dwight Foster Esq

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT WORCESTER,

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE;

JULY 4, 1797.

BY DR. OLIVER FISKE.



PRINTED AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS,

BY ISAIAH THOMAS, JUN.

SOLD BY HIM AT HIS BOOKSTORE, SIGN OF JOHNSON'S HEAD.—JULY—A. D.—1797.

ORATION

PRONOUNCED AT WORCESTER

WORCESTER, July 4, 1797.

AT a *MEETING* of a large number of *GENTLEMEN* of this and the neighbouring towns, to celebrate the *ANNIVERSARY* of the *INDEPENDENCE* of the *UNITED STATES*:—

VOTED—That *ISAIAH THOMAS*, *BENJAMIN HEYWOOD*, Esqs. and *Mr. DANIEL WALDO*, Jun. be a *Committee* to wait on *DR. OLIVER FISKE*, to thank him for the elegant and patriotic *ORATION* he has this day delivered, and to request a copy thereof for the *PRESS*.

The *COMMITTEE* accordingly waited upon him, and received the following *ANSWER*:

“*THAT* as a deference to the wishes of his fellow citizens, had influenced him in accepting so conspicuous a part in the public duties of the day, the same motive would induce him to comply with their request, so politely communicated by the gentlemen of the committee.”

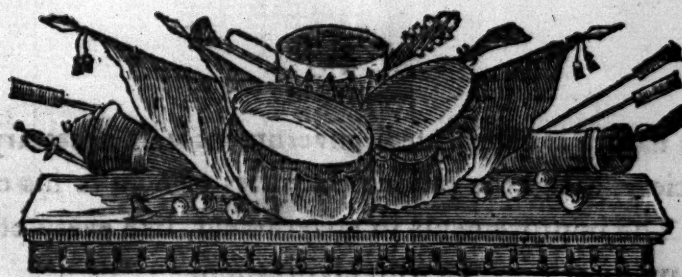
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PRINTED AT THE WORCESTER PRESS BY J. B. ALLEN

BY J. B. ALLEN

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ORATION:

PRONOUNCED AT WORCESTER, JULY 4, 1797.



SUMMONED at a late moment, to perform the duties of this JOYFUL ANNIVERSARY, you will not deem me either wanting in respect to my auditory, or indifferent to the blessings we have THIS DAY assembled to commemorate, should I fall short of your expectations in the execution of the task assigned me.

A MINUTE review of those causes, which, from an almost physical necessity, led to that crisis which gave us existence as a nation, you might justly deem impertinent, since the picture of those eventful days is still lively on our memories, or has been reflected to us from the historic page. The events which are in connexion with our political nativity, are the subjects of infantile prattle—an estimation of the blessings of our birthright “grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength.”

AS human nature is constituted, government is as necessary to the existence of society, as are the rational faculties of man to his comfort and happiness. The improvements in government, like every other science, will hold an uniform progress with civilization.

A CIVILIAN may delineate the features of a government, which, in theory, may embrace all that is essential to the happiness of the subject—yet if he keeps not in view the state of its moral improvement, his labours are but idle speculation.

UNCIVILIZED by the arts of refinement, mankind are in a state of hostility. Of this degrading truth, the early history of the World—but especially of ancient Europe and modern America, affords most clear and striking specimens. To ameliorate the ferocity of the human mind, to enlarge its faculties, and to render man the happy subject of civil government, is the province of education.

THE *Amor Patriæ*, in its natural sense, is, perhaps, not the result of the demonstrable excellence of one's country, so much, as the remote influence of *selflove*, which the wise Author of Nature has directed, should be the primary agent in the affections and conduct of mankind. Among an enlightened people, where patriotism is benevolence, an attachment to our country is founded on more noble principles.

HOW far it is the duty of every nation to support its established government, is not material for us to decide;—so far as it keeps progress with civilization, and conforms to the genius of the people, its subjects will feel such an attachment to it, as will prevent any dangerous innovation.

THAT

THAT our form of government is the most perfect that the nature of man will admit, is not merely the sentiment of those who feel its benign influence, but is a truth which bears the test of the most enlightened and disinterested civilian. "There is a kind of government," says the venerable MONTESQUIEU, "possessed of all the *internal advantages* of a republic and *external force* of a monarchy :"—And, What is this but a confederated republic?

OUR federal government, adopted by its citizens, from a conviction of its excellence—free in its principles—mild, yet energetic—where Liberty, in its true import, is fostered and defended—and at the same time possessing in itself the powers of renovation—while Virtue, on which it is predicated, remains, will be the object of our confidence and support.

SUBORDINATION, so obnoxious to some of the feelings of the human heart, is here qualified by a consciousness, that an obedience to our laws is the voluntary offspring of inclination—and a deference for our rulers, is no other than a respect for ourselves.

THE independent State Governments, like the planets in their orbits, revolving on their own axis, are preserved in their specific powers, and relative situation, by the federal government, which, like the genial sun, imparts life, comfort, and vigor to the whole.

THAT there are many in our country dissatisfied with its government, is no conclusive evidence of its imperfection. Until the passions of man subside, and reason holds an undisturbed empire in his breast, envy, selfinterest, or ambition, may raise a partial ferment in the community. These ebullitions, under some governments, are harmless, if not salutary. But in a government like ours, where the rulers and the people are but
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the different modifications of the same mass—and at stated periods, are moulded into the same lump—these party heats and animosities are troublesome, if not dangerous.

THAT there are imperfections in our federal government is not to be denied—it is the offspring of man—the Sun too has its spots—but, To what effect have they been discovered? Its light, its heat and vivifying influence, still subserve the comfort and happiness of man.

to give us a true estimate of the blessings of our own country, and to attach us more firmly to our own government, it may not be unprofitable, on this occasion, to look abroad from our secure and peaceful asylum, to contemplate the clouds which are yet lowering, or bursting forth in tornadoes upon the Old World.

ENGLAND, justified by the genius of its government, is feeding on its own entrails. The image, "part iron and part clay," is fast crumbling, and must fall under its own weight. Bankrupt, and without credit, she is supported by charity and indulgence. Pride, which is seldom humbled by adversity, is soothed under her broken fortune, by the parade of power, and the affectation of her former greatness. A spirit of disaffection, in the habit of reform, is gone forth; and, Who shall prescribe its limits?

so numerous and so respectable are the advocates for a change of ministry and measures, that a manly expression of their sentiments, and a spirited exertion to effect a reform, is no longer denominated TREASON. The idea of a transportation to Botanybay, excites no terror. From the livery men to the Lord Mayor of London, disaffection has been manifested. Their demands for a reform have already been echoed from all quarters of the kingdom. The navy, the pride and security of the government—

ernment—the bulwork of the nation—is infected with the wide spreading contagion. This weapon, with which alone she can annoy her enemies, or secure her own existence, seems ready to fall from her nerveless hand.

THE revolt in the British fleet, and the concessions of the ministry, is a decisive experiment of the extent of national disaffection, and of the inability of government to punish its effects. The people, by this experiment, have learned their power, and they will use it at their own discretion.

THIS crisis, which the gradual change in the feelings and sentiments of the nation was slowly accomplishing, was accelerated by the unjust and impolitic interference of government in the concerns of her neighbours. Their endeavours to aid the cause of *despotism* abroad, and to suppress the freedom of *investigation* at home, have disgraced their annals, and rendered them contemptible to the world.

WHAT is FRANCE, that mild, that courteous nation—at whose revolution commenced the *Age of Reason*—and whose motto was THE RIGHTS OF MAN? A republic of TYRANTS! Under their former government, indeed, they were chastened with rods—but since its destruction, with whips of scorpions! For what did they abolish the Bastille and Inquisition? Thousands of the most innocent and respectable of their inhabitants have witnessed their refinements upon these instruments of barbarity!

THE savage of our dreary wilderness, who knows no other laws than the instincts of ferocious nature, might have received lessons of cruelty and torture from this polite and gallant people, far beyond what he had ever been stimulated to by the most insatiate thirst for blood!

It is most unfortunate for the interest of Liberty, for France, and, perhaps, for the whole civilized world, that this revolution, which only changed the form of despotism instead of abolishing it, commenced at so early a period of their national improvement. Had knowledge been more universally diffused, and had the people *felt the influence* of liberty no faster than they could understand its *nature*, they might have effected their object, without effacing their moral principle, and deluging their country with blood. The world might then have had a second instance of the triumph of reason and philosophy over the human passions, rendered more impatient of control by the relaxed state of moral and civil influence, consequent upon the change of national government.

IN extenuation of the excesses of the French, it is but just to remark, that under their corrupt government it was impossible that republican principles, when disseminated, should have a vigorous growth. The soil had so long been choked with the weeds of despotism, and the atmosphere of courts had become so pestiferous, that the germ of liberty, ere it could expand, was blasted by its deadly influence.

THE conductors of the French revolution had not sufficiently studied the science of legislation—and it should seem, that they were not much conversant with the volume of human nature—For surely they could not intentionally have adopted measures, which in their necessary consequence, must bring on the crimes and calamities which ensued, and by which they were the first to suffer.

IN America, where they had first witnessed the flame of liberty, they saw a free government established with facility. But the task to them was far more difficult. In the gradual progress of improvement, our country had arrived, in its manners and government, to that grade next subordinate

subordinate to the republican form we wished to establish. We had stability and virtue in our rulers—the influence of the clergy, and of the religion which they taught.—But the French were anticipating the labours of a century. Every mound was at once levelled—law, religion, and every other restraint, was carried headlong by the impetuous torrent of human passion. The more moderate and virtuous of their rulers were swept away by the current, or receded from its approach. Their places were instantly filled by demagogues, whose element is anarchy, and who exist when virtue is no more!

FACTION now became organized: And the national assembly, so numerous, and of almost diurnal change, afforded not a channel sufficiently broad for the torrent of ambition, vanity and enthusiasm, which flowed from the motly rulers of the nation. The Jacobin club—that fungus from the hot bed of licentiousness—that battering ram of order and government, now sprang up. Its influence, like the deadly poison of asps, circulated from the vitals to the extremities, and for a while paralyzed every sinew of the nation.

As freedom and happiness were the objects of the people of France in the commencement of their revolution, their cause was advocated by our countrymen, with the ardour natural to those, who had so lately traversed the same ground in pursuit of liberty—who enjoy its blessings, and know how to estimate its value.—This fellow feeling was rendered more lively by the idea, that the coal which had lighted their flame had been taken from our altar.

LONG and violent was the struggle between our affections for this brave and oppressed people, and our abhorrence of the crimes with which they were so early disgraced. With what solicitude have we sought

sought to reconcile our feelings to their excesses, by imputing them to their eagerness to grasp the heavenly boon, which the common enemies of the rights of man were endeavouring to filch from their embrace ! With what rapture did we listen to the information of a victory, when gained in a conflict with the foes of their liberty ! But the subsequent periods of their revolution have been so strongly marked with features so repugnant to the object of freedom, that to justify their measures, would be to abandon the principles which inspired and established our own independence.

HOW far has the pure spirit of Liberty, and a sacred regard to the RIGHTS OF MAN, influenced the French in their crusades into Germany, Austria and Italy ?—To the latter of which, Vesuvius, with its boiling torrents of lava, hath never been so destructive.

WHAT but a wanton and insatiate thirst for plunder has impelled them to strip their public edifices of the relicts of antiquity, and the monuments of their improvements in the fine arts—their only boast—and as dear to them as their household gods ?

WHATEVER are the difficulties which they may be led to combat in their road to some permanent government, must be left to that GOD who can bring ORDER out of confusion :—But may we not justly fear, that when foreign wars shall have ceased to employ their force and attention abroad—when their armies shall be disbanded and again swell their sections—when their exiles, whether made such by compulsion or choice, shall return, in the collision of parties, whose interest is at variance with the public, their own country will be the theatre for the last act of their prowess ? Should this be their melancholy catastrophe, some leader, more fortunate in his resources and intrigue, will catch the flowing reins, and close the scene, by reducing this illfated people to a state more
 abject

subject than that from which they have with so much difficulty emerged. May that OMNIPOTENT POWER, who governs the nations of the earth by his wisdom, direct her future Councils, and preserve the World from witnessing so disgraceful an event!

It is the pleasing office of philanthropy, to cast the mantle of charity upon the imperfections of man. In his individual capacity it would be uncandid to paint his failings in the colours they might bear. But national vices ought never to be paliated. They arise, not so much from the imperfection, as from the perversion of the human powers—and it is our duty to record them as a memento, particularly to a people whose government is in their own hand, and who can feel no greater power than their own sovereign will.

PREJUDICES, whether personal or national, are unpleasant in their indulgence, and, oftentimes, disastrous in their effects. Neutral in our conduct, it is to be lamented, that we are not more so in our affections. The name of an AMERICAN comprises all our duty, and should influence all our zeal.

SELFINTEREST is no less the ruling principle of nations than of individuals. And we may rest assured, that neither French nor English fraternity will avail us, whenever it shall be incompatible with this principle. This we have already experienced from both nations. We are their friends, or their enemies—their generous allies, or insidious foes, as will best subserve their interest to consider us. Instead of our vibrating in our affections from one nation to the other, from any *alternate attraction*, their conduct should operate upon the principle of equal and opposite *repulsion*, to fix us at a point equally distant from both.

THAT

THAT France, through her ministers, has taken some of the most unjustifiable measures with our country, is a fact not controverted. Giddy with her astonishing successes, it was not to be expected that she would conduct with that mild decorum, which maturity of years, and solidity of character, would inspire. The blame is not wholly hers. To the disgrace of human nature, there are characters among us, and others, whom our country has disgorged upon a soil where their disorganising principles can be more fully indulged, who, to gratify their resentment, avarice, or ambition, would precipitate America to the lowest point of misery and degradation.

It is an evidence of the mildness and philosophy of the times, and also of the impotence of these detestable ingrates, that they are suffered peaceably to inhabit the country they so infamously abuse.

It must ever be the fate of neutral nations to be more or less incommoded in their commercial intercourse with belligerent powers. Laws of nations, and special treaties, will reciprocally be disregarded, by individuals, in their pursuit of gain. Whenever such practices become the object of serious notice, a more prompt execution of the existing laws, or an amicable investigation of complaints, are sufficient to remedy the evil. But France refuses to listen to any overtures on the subject. She has reduced piracy to system.—But she is not yet so lost to virtue as to decline a justification of her conduct.

Our late treaty with Great Britain seemed to afford the most plausible pretext. That this, however, is but a mere apology for her measures, is evident from her conduct towards the other neutral powers. To destroy the commerce of England is her policy. To this single point she is willing to sacrifice her own *honour* and the *interests* of her friends.

HER last, her consummate act of injustice and insult, has been offered our nation in her late rejection of our minister—who was commissioned to proffer the hand of friendship, and to remove every ground of jealousy and distrust.

OUR government, uniformly just and pacific, has preserved its dignity by instituting a renewal of negociation. Whatever shall be its success, France and the World will have ample evidence, that *justice* and *moderation* have influenced our measures.—And we stand ready, whenever driven to the necessity, to give as ample evidence, that not even France, “rich in her resources and terrible to her enemies,” as she boasts herself, has power to appoint us our *rulers*, or intimidate a *determined*, an INDEPENDENT PEOPLE. We have only to resort with unanimity to the strong holds of our government; and we may *defy* every effort of our enemies.

AMONG the many interesting events since our last anniversary—or, indeed, the most noble the world ever witnessed, is the voluntary descent of the illustrious WASHINGTON from the highest pinnacle of honour to which man ever ascended, to the unenvied station of private life. His character, which already seemed beyond the power of human nature to imitate, is now complete.

LONG may he enjoy, in the retirement he has so ardently sought, the blessings of his grateful country, and the consummate happiness of witnessing the virtue and prosperity of that people, whose *battles* he has fought, and whose *liberties* defended!

ALTHOUGH this political luminary is retired below the western horizon, his resplendent rays are yet left as a *light to our feet*, and a *lamp to our path*.

IT is a signal instance of the favour of heaven, that the successor of our late President so nearly imitates his virtues, and, from his public services, so eminently deserves the highest honours of his country. His republican firmness, so often tried, will repel the most distant approach of foreign influence, or domestic intrigue. Versed in the science of government, long may he continue in its pure and peaceful administration.

ON THIS AUSPICIOUS DAY, while we are recounting the blessings we enjoy in common with our country, a recollection of the favours peculiar to this Commonwealth will inspire us with gratitude to that Being, who accommodates his goodness to the exigencies of man. The election of our present chief Magistrate, is an event highly auspicious—not only to his constituents, but to our country at large. Mild and dispassionate in his nature—candid and benevolent in principle—courteous and affable in his deportment—firm and inflexible in his duty, justice and unanimity will pervade our councils—order and harmony our land.

A TRIBUTE of respectful gratitude is due to that venerable patriot, our late Governour, to whose early and spirited exertions we are so much indebted for the rich blessings of our Independence. In his voluntary retirement from public labours, may he find such rewards for his services as shall soften the pillow of infirmity, and solace the evening of his days.

ALTHOUGH man seems progressing to a state of perfection—yet the history of society, and even our own feelings, admonish us, that there are certain limits in human nature, where a revolution will take place, and we again descend the vale of infirmity.

IN this grade of our existence, it seems the necessary economy of nature, that excess should be followed by its opposite extreme.

THERE are stages in the progress of communities as in human existence. The *rise* and the *fall* of empires have equally employed the labours of the historian.

AND while we are contemplating the rising glory and improvement of our country, let us not be too vainly confident of its uninterrupted continuance.

THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE—who gave all systems birth—
Form'd man with pow'rs to rule his native earth—
Whose equal hand does every sphere control ;
And writes his first law—ORDER—on the whole ;
He fix'd the summit where all systems tend ;
There writes this mandate—HERE THY COURSE MUST END.

SHOULD men, while mortal, reach ærial height,
And rival ANGELS in the realms of light :
Like them they'd fall—like them from heaven be hurl'd,
And reign the DEMONS of some future world.



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 He fix'd the seasons when all systems tend;
 There wings his mandate—HERE THY COURSE MUST END;
 Should men, while mortal, reach celestial heights,
 And rival angels in the regions of light;
 Like them they'd fall—their wings would be built,
 And ruin the domains of darkness.

